

ADOT briefs residents on Grand plan

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Traffic, safety, noise and cost were among the issues Tuesday during an open house in Sun City where state transportation officials outlined the final design of the Grand Avenue widening project.

Dozens congregated in the West Hall of Sundial Recreation Center for one of two West Valley presentations. A second meeting was in Surprise.

"We are holding these meetings in part because we want to hear your concerns and ideas and address them," said ADOT project manager Brock Barnhart.

"We have not yet chosen a contractor, and so there is still time to tweak our plans based on what the people want."

The project, which has been in various stages of planning since 2005, will widen Grand Avenue between 99th Avenue and the Loop 303 to three lanes in both directions. Construction will begin in fall 2009 and is expected to take about 18 months to finish.

Barnhart identified a handful of concerns that he said ADOT wanted to be sure to address, the first being the effect construction will have on traffic.

"Two lanes will remain open in both directions throughout the process," Barnhart said. "Intersections will never be completely closed. Also, businesses will never be inaccessible during business hours."

An area of particular concern in the Sun City area is pedestrian safety.

"We will be installing new pedestrian signals with timer countdowns, so when you are crossing the street you will know exactly how much time you have left," Barnhart said. "We will also have median islands with push-button signals so those who can not make it all the way across can stop halfway and wait."

Barnhart said the project will leave enough room on the shoulders for bicycle lanes, although it will be up to communities affected by the project to stripe the road for them.

ADOT also plans to use rubberized asphalt for the project, which Barnhart said will help reduce noise considerably.

Several residents asked about the cost of the project and how construction would be phased.

"Those are things we will not know until we have a contractor," Barnhart said. "Once we have one, we will give updates on how the construction will be spread out. At this point, we don't know if it will start at Loop 303 and move east or at 99th Avenue and move west. That will be up to the contractor to decide."

Project updates are available in a variety of formats, from posts on www.valleyfreeways.com to e-mail notices to newsletters. There also is a 24-hour project hot line at 480-890-3055.

With the Arizona economy in bad shape and many saying the United States is in a recession, the question was raised of how secure the funding for the project is and if there is any chance of it falling through. The project is funded through the Regional Transportation Plan, a 20-year plan enacted in 2004. Barnhart said ADOT is not worried about the money disappearing.

"We have the design for the project in place, we are going to start bidding for a contractor, and things are moving along very smoothly," Barnhart said. "We feel very confident that this project will continue to move forward."

Barnhart concluded by reminding the audience that ADOT is still looking for input from the public. To offer an opinion or to sign up for the project updates, visit www.valleyfreeways.com.

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